

Tom Lyden, FOX 9

Troubled bridge replacement stalled for 20 years

STILLWATER, Minn. - Replacing a troubled bridge over the St. Croix River has hit another snag in its 20-year struggle -- the National Park Service says it won't approve the current project because the proposed replacement is too ugly.

When it comes to a new bridge, beauty is not in the eye of the beholder, but the federal government.

The plan to replace the dilapidated Stillwater Lift Bridge has stalled and been on and off for roughly two decades, with nearly 18,000 people crossing each day despite reports claiming the bridge is in worse shape than the Interstate 35 bridge was before it collapsed.

Meanwhile, the cost of the bridge that has yet to be built keeps climbing by \$1,115,000 for every month it is delayed. Currently, the cost stands at \$655 million. That's more than the new I-35 bridge that was fast-tracked over the Mississippi -- \$261 million -- and the Wakota bridge -- \$114 million -- combined.

The St. Croix project would be more expensive in part because it's really a 7-mile project when including the massive redesign of the approaches on both the Minnesota and Wisconsin sides, which will cost about half as much as the bridge itself.

The King Energy power plant is one of the primary reasons that the St. Croix River was established as a wild and scenic river. Then-Sen. Walter Mondale worried that the power plant was a harbinger of things to come, so the St. Croix became the first of eight rivers to be included in the Wild and Scenic River Act of 1968. Now, 252 rivers are protected.

Recently, Rep. Michele Bachman introduced legislation that would exempt the St. Croix Bridge Project from that act, but Rep. Betty McCollum opposes it. Though congressional hearings may discuss the issue -- but officials said they expect organizations, such as The Sierra Club, to oppose it.

